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Opening the Door to Peer Observation

Meaningful interactions that result from peer observation enhance the experience and outcomes for both the peer and the observer. Kip Hottman, Spanish Teacher at Fern Creek High School in Jefferson County, says it like this:

“I never understood the power of peer observation until living and breathing it last year. ... No one talked about peer observation when I entered the profession; now it is a normal part of how we do business. The closed classroom door is an idea of the past. Instead, we must promote a practice of open doors and meaningful reflection with those who know our work best, our peers.”

Because peer observation is relatively new to many Kentucky schools, beginning the process may be full of unknowns. For some, it will be the first time colleagues attempt to work together through an observation model. Peer observation partnerships get easier with time and practice and are well worth the effort they require to initiate. Following the suggestions in this article may help increase the comfort level, guide early conversations, and maximize results for the peer and the observer.

The first step of the process is to partner with a peer. For some, this is a voluntary process, and in some schools, peer observers are assigned. If you are unfamiliar with your peer observation partner, an initial contact and pre-conference meeting are essential. Consider the following tips for a successful first meeting:

- When possible, schedule in a comfortable environment (snacks optional).
- Include a word of appreciation or encouragement in invitations/emails.
- Be a good listener and keep an open mind; build rapport.
- Make eye contact and maintain a positive, encouraging demeanor.
- Allow for wait time so that each person has ample opportunity to verbalize thoughts.
- Establish a focus for the observation from the *KyFIT* or [Specialist Framework](#); this may be related to a professional growth goal.
- Agree upon the date and time of the observation, as well as the type of data to be collected, such as scripting, tick marks, diagrams.
- Prepare open-ended questions for the post-observation conference.
- Ground conversations in the language of the frameworks.
- Stay focused on student learning.
- Establish common purpose, expectations, and desired outcomes of the observation.

Peer observations are most likely to produce desired results when they are non-threatening, confidential and driven by the professional goals of the person being observe (the observe). From the start, be sure to clarify that all peer observation feedback is initially shared with the observee ONLY; however, the observee may elect to share the feedback, results, or reports with the principal to be considered as a PGES source of evidence.



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The peer observation process provides an opportunity for all parties to grow professionally through a formative and collaborative process (Domain 4E: Growing and Developing Professionally). Dr. Angie Gunter, literacy consultant with the Green River Regional Educational Cooperative (GRREC), summarizes many of the benefits of peer observation:

“In answering my questions, [the teachers’] passion for their jobs and their students’ success was evident. I think they enjoyed being able to share their choices with someone who was genuinely interested. I also found myself considering how I could incorporate their successful strategies in my own classroom. My curriculum is different, but every course of study should include challenging content, clarity of difficult concepts, structure, and smooth transitions.”

For more information about becoming a certified peer observer or the peer observation process, visit the [PGES Observation page](#) on the [Kentucky Department of Education \(KDE\) website](#).
